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EGYPTIAN ART
Tomb of Dehuti-Nekht and his Wife

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

BOSTON

II

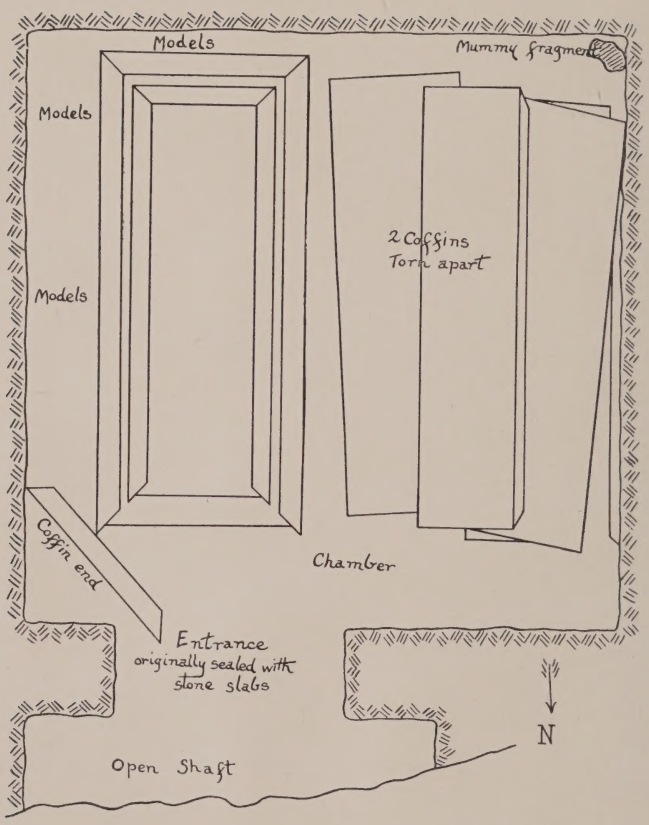
EGYPTIAN ART

Tomb of Dehuti-Nekht
and his Wife. 1927.

Department of Egyptian Art
Gallery Guide no. 2

GALLERY BOOK

c1927


Models
Mummy fragments
Models
2 Coffins
Torn apart
Models
Coffin end
Chamber
Entrance
originally sealed with
stone slabs
N
Open Shaft

THE TOMB OF DEHUTI-NEKHT AND HIS WIFE

About 2000 B. C.

Near the modern village of Deir-el-Bersheh on the bank of the Nile, about 175 miles south of Cairo, lies a group of rock-cut tombs, high up on the desert cliffs which overlook the valley. These are the burial places of noblemen of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (2100 - 1700 B. C.). When originally cut in the living rock they consisted of an entrance portico and one or more rectangular chambers hollowed out of the hill, and of a vertical shaft descending to a small room below, in which the mummy rested inside one or more sarcophagi. The chamber was intended for the use of the living, who there made offerings to the deceased, and its walls were decorated with scenes from his life, and with charms and prayers for his welfare in the underworld. The shaft and burial room were never visited after the funeral, but were carefully sealed up, and the entrance to the shaft made as invisible as possible to prying eyes. Modern archaeologists have examined many of the offering chambers, and have published the inscriptions and paintings on their walls, but the site had never been fully examined because of great falls of rock which had occurred. These falls were due in the first instance to extensive quarrying operations in ancient times which so weakened the whole that earthquakes brought down great masses of rock which crushed and concealed many of the chambers and shafts. This seeming catastrophe has proved a blessing in disguise, for it effectively prevented the earlier discovery of the shaft from which our sarcophagi came.

The story of the almost miraculous preservation of these treasures is quickly told. After the burial was made (about 2000 B. C.), the tomb remained inviolate for two thousand years or more, when it was entered and partly robbed by the Romans. On leaving the burial room the robbers had set fire to a mass of mummy wrappings and wood, with the intention of destroying the contents, but by a fortunate accident the fire went out before any appreciable damage was done. Subsequently a fall

of rock effectually protected the tomb from further violation, and so it remained until our Expedition, by careful and laborious blasting operations, laid bare the entrance to the burial shaft.

The Discovery of the Sarcophagi.

The accompanying rough sketch will give some idea of the condition of the burial room and its contents. Upon removal of the stone slabs from the entrance (these had simply been prised out at one corner by the Romans), the first sight that met the eye was a great sarcophagus of cedar imported from Lebanon, the cover still in place, but the end taken off by the plunderers, revealing the smaller case within. To the right of this lay the dismembered pieces of another sarcophagus, an outer and an inner case, which had been taken apart by the plunderers in their search for gold. All four of these cases bear the name of the hereditary Prince DEHUTI-NEKHT, the feudal ruler of the province of Hermopolis, in which these tombs are situated. One contained the mummy of his wife, and the other that of the nobleman himself. A fragment of one of these mummies was found thrown aside in one corner of the room; the rest had either been destroyed by the plunderers or had since fallen to dust. A large number of wooden models of ships and their crews, and of servants engaged in different occupations, had originally been set out beside the sarcophagi, and these were found piled up in inextricable confusion against the walls.

The Purpose of an Egyptian Tomb.

It is important for an understanding of these objects, especially the painted scenes on the sarcophagi, to explain briefly the purpose which they were intended to serve. The paintings on the walls of the sarcophagi were not intended for decoration - they are on the inner surfaces where they could be but poorly seen before the sarcophagus was put into use, and were quite invisible once the lid was put on. These paintings, as their position implies, were designed for the use of the deceased. They served a magic purpose somewhat difficult to define, whereby a picture or a potent written

phrase became instinct with a shadow reality for the use of the shadowy being or ka that the Egyptian imagined the soul to be. This ka, residing in the body within the coffin, could draw sustenance from the pictured food depicted in the principal offering scene, or could make use of the various other objects painted on the surfaces surrounding him. Similarly, the wooden models placed in the tomb permitted the soul to enjoy the fruits of the labors performed by the miniature servants who worked perpetually for his benefit. For to the ancient Egyptian the life of the soul in the next world was essentially a repetition of the life to which he had been accustomed on earth; its pleasures continued to satisfy him, its needs - food, drink, clothing, shelter - were the same, and its dangers must be guarded against by the use of charms and magic incantations. Prayers to the gods formed an important part of man's existence, for by this means their favor was enlisted and their protection against the abounding evil spirits, both in this world and the next, was assured. Long before the time with which we are here concerned, a complete set of appropriate prayers and incantations had come into use to ensure the safe passage of the soul through the underworld, and these texts form what is known as the "Book of the Dead."

Let us turn now to the examination of the paintings and inscriptions on the finest of our sarcophagi, which is exhibited on the west side of the Middle Kingdom Room. At the centre of the west wall is the lid of the sarcophagus, the under side toward the spectator. To right and left are the two side pieces, their inner surfaces toward the room, and against the north and south end walls are the head and the foot ends respectively. On the floor, in the centre of the room, lies the bottom, with the inner case put together and resting upon it in the original position. To reconstruct the parts in their original relation to each other, the spectator may imagine the two side pieces placed face inward against the inner case, that on the right to the west, and that on the left to the east; the two end pieces similarly moved, but transposed, the foot end to the west and the head end to the east. If the lid be then placed face down over the whole, the original arrangement would be complete.

The Paintings.

The mummy lay with its head immediately opposite the door painted on the right side piece. This door enabled the soul to pass freely in and out of the sarcophagus, and a pair of eyes are depicted over it, and again on the outside, to enable him to look forth from the tomb. To the right of this door, with its elaborate ornamental superstructure, is the principal offering scene. DEHUTI-NEKHT is seated on a throne in front of a golden vase, and inhales the perfume of burning incense offered by a servant, while a profusion of food offerings are heaped up around him. Here may be seen game of many kinds - birds, both living and dressed ready for cooking, cattle, gazelle, and other animals trussed ready for the slaughter, as well as many cuts of meat. These latter include rib roasts, legs and shoulders, a calf's head, calves feet, and several hearts. Many kinds of vegetables are shown, including a bunch of onions, while tables are set with jars and baskets containing other eatables and drinkables. Over the head of DEHUTI-NEKHT is an inscription of eight columns in which the divinities Osiris, Maat and Tefnut, Isis and Nephthys, Amset and Hapi, Tuamautef and Quebsenuf, Thoth and Anubis, are asked to give food offerings to the deceased. At the top, running the whole length of the side, is a prayer to Thoth and to "every god" to favor the "Honored One before the Great God, Lord of Heaven, the Hereditary Prince, DEHUTI-NEKHT, because of this writing of divine words." Immediately to the right of the main offering scene a single vertical column contains a prayer to be recited by the funerary priest. To the left of this column and immediately below the top line are 33 short columns containing charms to be spoken by various gods, while below this two rows contain a prayer to Osiris to give "all good things to the Honorable DEHUTI-NEKHT" on various specified feast days. To the right of the vertical column are seen two long rows of kneeling servants presenting offerings to the enthroned figure of the deceased, while over their heads appear lists specifying each object offered and the amount. The lower right hand field is devoted to texts from the "Book of the Dead," incised in the wood and colored with black ink, but not painted.

The opposite side of the sarcophagus is no less interesting. At the top is a prayer pleading for the "life, prosperity, health and strength" of DEHUTI-NEKHT "forever." This prayer extends over three rows. The fourth contains a catalogue of the objects appearing below. The opposite side is largely devoted to food offerings, but this side shows us the personal equipment which the noble wished to take with him to the next world, and which here lay ready to his hand in pictured form. At the extreme right is seen the nobleman's bed, supported on the legs of a lion, and with the head of that animal carved at one end. Arranged under the bed are four pillows of different styles and materials, while upon it lies a fifth. Beside the pillow lies the boomerang, and next to this a case containing four knives, of which the handles only appear. To the left of the bed are three chests, their contents displayed above them. Here are three magnificent necklaces or collars of gold and faience beads and three large pendants of the same materials. Next comes the official staff of office in the form of a crook, and this is accompanied by other staves, spears, a sword and dagger. Beyond, a fourth chest has a folded garment lying on its cover, while above appears a decorated fan. Beside the fan hangs a mirror in a beautifully ornamented leather case, and next to this three others on tall wooden stands, of gold, silver and copper. Beneath the mirrors are five small chests, two of which have folded garments lying upon them. To the left of the mirrors is a large pleated kilt of cloth of gold, and above this two scribe's palettes with places for red and black ink. These are followed by bead bracelets, various vessels of gold, silver and copper, seven arrows, and eight little bags labeled "Royal provisions." Beyond are two small tables with food offerings, one bearing the heads of several animals, and the other set with vessels containing drink. Other objects depicted here are of uncertain identity. Finally come the weapons and tools provided for the nobleman's use. The former consist of a shield of leather, tanned with the hair on, a quiver full of arrows, of the same material, and a similar quiver of spears. The tools include a saw, axe, adze, and three chisels and drills, together with the bow and cord with which they

were used. Finally, the lower half of this side is covered with texts from the "Book of the Dead," similar to those on the opposite side.

The head end of the sarcophagus shows four registers of painted figures above the usual texts from the "Book of the Dead." The first row bears an inscription to the effect that "This box (contains?) ointments for the Honored One before Anubis, the Hereditary Prince, DEHUTI-NEKHT." The second row contains an offering formula, and the third is divided into 19 columns in which appears a catalogue of the objects portrayed below; these are, among a number of doubtful identity, an ebony head-rest, two bows, two sacks of eye paint, one green and one black, and seven stone jars containing ointments and perfumes, all carefully stoppered and sealed.

The foot end of the outer sarcophagus has its inner face entirely covered with the small incised texts from the "Book of the Dead," except for the ornamental colored border, which appears on all the four pieces. The cover has two colored bands of hieroglyphics, between which again appear the small incised texts, while the bottom of the sarcophagus is entirely covered with the latter. The outer surface of the sides, ends, and cover all bear a single line of inscription in blue, giving the name and titles of the owner. The manner in which the different pieces were assembled is ingenious and effective. The four corners were bevelled with the exception of a thin piece at the top, which was left square to give the effect of a plain right-angle joint. These bevelled faces were fastened by an internal binding of copper ribbons, passing through holes which were afterwards concealed by pegs, and long wooden pins driven diagonally through the corners supplemented this binding. The sides were fastened to the cleats which supported the bottom in the same manner. Traces of the copper binding ribbons may be seen on the cleats under the bottom as well as on the right hand side piece.

Turning now to the inner case, we find its walls decorated with similar scenes, arranged in the same manner, but less finished in execution. The great food offering scene

is entirely omitted, though the door and the servants bearing offerings are repeated. It is interesting to note that, while the scenes on the outer case are painted only, those on the inner are cut in relief as well. The lid, which was without colored decoration, is not shown. It was similar to that of the outer case, and was fastened in place by means of pegs driven through the end pieces and into the cleats on the under side of the lid.

The Models.

Associated with these sarcophagi were a large number of wooden models portraying the nobleman's retainers engaged in various pursuits. These were destined for the satisfaction of his needs in the next world, which, as we have already seen, were similar to those of the earthly life. Prominent among these little groups was a collection of about forty ships with their crews. These were intended to transport the deceased along the Nile of the underworld, upon which he would spend much of his time, not only for pleasure - hunting and fishing - but in travel between his various estates. Of these boats one of the largest is the princely barge, fitted with a spacious cabin having doors fore and aft. At the forward end the cabin roof is extended to form a sort of porch, under which is a table, stowed against the wall, and a small travelling trunk. Beneath the porch sit three men singing and clapping their hands, while a fourth squats near by, enveloped in a white cloak. A fifth man stands at the entrance looking forward. Originally the helmsman sat upon the cabin roof at the rear, and swung the great steering oar, while in the bow a man was stationed to sound the river with a pole and give warning against hidden sand-banks. On long journeys the barge was accompanied by the kitchen boat, on which the cook may be seen sitting over his work in front of the cabin, while the helmsman squats on the roof and steers. Another model represents an armed despatch boat, long and narrow, with eighteen rowers, helmsman and bowsman, the spears and shields stowed amidships, and the mooring stake together with the mallet for driving it into the bank, ready on deck. To the right may be seen the nobleman's pleasure barge, rowed by six men, and with

a couch on which the owner might recline in the shade of a canopy. The bow and stern are modelled and decorated with rosettes. Other boats show the crew at the sweeps, rowing down stream against the prevailing north wind, the mast and sails unshipped, while yet others represent ships sailing up the Nile before the wind, the sail set, and the crew hauling on the ropes.

Of all the models the finest represents a procession bringing offerings to the tomb. A priest with shaven head leads, bearing a tall vase on his shoulder, and is followed by three women, two of whom balance baskets and trays on their heads, and carry live birds in the hand, holding them by their fluttering wings. This group is beautifully modelled and delicately colored, and is on a larger scale than the others. Finally two other models are of special interest. One shows two husbandmen plowing with a yoke of oxen, and the other represents brick makers at work. In the latter, two men bring the materials slung from a pole between them, two more mix the mud with water, one bending over the water jar and the other wielding a hoe. The fifth man presses the mixture in a wooden mould and lays out the cakes in a row to dry in the sun.